Plenty of parties in the Old First Ward

Revelers celebrate St. Patrick's Day despite coronavirus. | PAGE C1

THE BUFFALO NEWS SUNDAY

Bills preparing to build new team

Coach Sean McDermott is charting a course for the offseason | *Page B1*

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UP TO $251 IN SAVINGS

3 CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19 IN ERIE COUNTY

WNYers unsure how to react in emergency

Daily routines fall victim to virus

BY CAITLIN DEWEY
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The bars are full, but the shelves are empty. Schools are closing, but workplaces are not.

It turns out there's little coherence to life under the threat of coronavirus.

The viral pandemic, which produced its first three confirmed cases in Erie County on Saturday evening, has already roiled daily routines, date nights, store lines, travel plans and religious practices. It has canceled classes, closed museums and scrambled budgets.

And yet, even as local governments, businesses and school districts took decisive action to prepare for the virus over the past week, many Western New Yorkers appear unsure how to best react to a pandemic that has, in the span of a few short days, swept into every crevice of daily existence – from the pens available at the DMV to the sporting events on television.

Some are stockpiling toilet paper or bracing for layoffs. Others have snapped up cheap flights and packed bars or gyms where big-screen TVs blare the latest coronavirus news.

On Saturday evening, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz announced three confirmed cases in Erie County, of more than 40 samples tested for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

New York State late Saturday had 613 confirmed cases. By evening, officials had re-

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Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News

A man leaves Shea's Performing Arts Center's box office after getting a refund for "Hello, Dolly," which was canceled.

Will a surge in patients overwhelm hospitals?

BY JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN AND BRIAN M. ROSENTHAL
NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK – Two of the biggest hospital systems in the Northeast – New York City's Health and Hospitals Corp. and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital – plan to cancel nonemergency surgeries. NYU Langone Medical Center's Tisch Hospital turned a pediatric emergency room into a respiratory ward for adults. Northwell Health, which has a sprawling network of hospitals, is asking retired nurses to return to work.

But New York City's hospitals, widely considered among the best in the world, may still be moving too slowly to get ready for a coronavirus outbreak that has already overwhelmed other countries and is now taking root in the New York region, according to many health care experts.

"We are not prepared to deal with a rapid and severe surge of patients – we're just not," said Dr. Christopher Tedeschi, a longtime emergency physician and assistant professor at the Columbia University Medical Center. "We're sort of planning for what's going on right now, and we're trying to make up for lost time, but I'm not sure

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COVID-19 continues to spread in state

Two Assembly members test positive for the novel coronavirus. *Page A7*

- **Virtual learning:** As schools are forced to close, lessons are shifting online. *Page A10*
- **Risk patterns:** Scientists are mapping social networks to identify danger zones. *Page A11*

State reports first virus-related deaths

BY TOM PRECIOUS, KEITH MCSHEA AND MAKI BECKER
NEWS STAFF REPORTERS

COVID-19 has come to Erie County.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Saturday night announced three people in the county have tested positive for the virus.

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz confirmed the results, but county and state officials said they would not give any additional information until a news conference in Buffalo scheduled at 11 a.m. today.

The news of the three cases came amid a whirlwind of reports Saturday of new cases throughout the state:

- The state's two first coronavirus-related deaths were reported Saturday, both from downstate.
- Monroe County was placed under a state of emergency after a second person there was diagnosed with the disease. Orleans, Wyoming and Genesee counties also declared emergencies.
- Two Assembly members from Brooklyn tested positive for the virus, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said.
- And New York State now has 613 positive coronavirus cases, Cuomo said.

The governor said the number of new reported cases is likely to rise as the state expands its testing capacity. That doesn't mean the virus is spreading faster, he said, just that the state soon will have an accurate picture of its reach.

"The more tests we take, the more that number will go up," Cuomo told reporters.

The rapidly increasing number of positive cases only confirmed what state and county officials and public health experts have been warning for weeks – that COV-

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Cuomo lashes out at federal bill that will bring billions to New York

BY JERRY ZREMSKI
NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

WASHINGTON – A bipartisan bill the House passed early Saturday in response to the coronavirus pandemic will bring billions in Medicaid funding to New York, but Gov. Andrew Cuomo lashed out at the measure anyway, saying a provision in it hamstrings him from balancing the state budget.

The measure could bring upward of $6.7 billion to New York in the coming year to cover Medicaid costs associated with the coronavirus outbreak.

But it also includes a clause that bars the state from pushing any additional Medicaid costs on the counties. Cuomo had hoped to do just that to help cover an already-existing $4 billion hole in the Medicaid budget, part of a $6.1 billion overall state shortfall.

The state's two most powerful political figures – Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer and the governor – offered radically different takes on the House budget bill.

"This is a real lifeline for New York," Schumer said, adding: "New York, which is a state that has the greatest Medicaid expenses in the country, does very well under this plan, but any state that has big Medicaid expenses will do well."

But in a Saturday night conference call with reporters, Cuomo termed the federal legislation "insanity." He said it upended his proposal to force 57 counties and New York City to contribute if Medicaid spending rises more than 3% in a year.

"If I can't change that, we can't do a budget," Cuomo said, blaming the provision on Schumer and Rep. Nita Lowey, a downstate Democrat who chairs the House Appropriations Committee.

The House bill also boosts funding for food stamps, expands unemployment insurance and offers a modest version of the mandatory sick-leave proposal pushed by Sen. Kirsten E.

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